

(c) The Committee shall meet regularly to discuss NSF policies and practices regarding NEPA, and make recommendations on the need for or adequacy of environmental impact assessments or statements.

(d) With respect to actions of NSF, the Committee will:

(1) Maintain a list of actions for which environmental impact statements are being prepared.

(2) Revise this list at regular intervals, based on input from the directorates, and send revisions to CEQ.

(3) Make the list available for public inspection on request.

(4) Maintain a list of environmental impact assessments.

(5) Maintain a file of draft and final environmental impact statements.

(e) The Committee and/or the Chairman will perform such additional functions as are set forth elsewhere in this part and in other NSF issuances.

[45 FR 40, Jan. 2, 1980, as amended at 49 FR 37596, Sept. 25, 1984; 59 FR 37438, July 22, 1994]

§ 640.3 Actions requiring an environmental assessment and categorical exclusions.

(a) The types of actions to be classified as “major Federal actions” subject to NEPA procedures are discussed generally in the CEQ regulations. Paragraph (b) of this section describes various classes of NSF actions that normally require the preparation of an environmental assessment or an EIS, and those classes that are categorically excluded. (Categorical exclusion is defined at 40 CFR 1508.4.) The word “normally” is stressed; there may be individual cases in which specific factors require contrary action. NSF directorates and offices are responsible for identifying situations in which an environmental assessment or an EIS should be prepared even if not normally required by paragraph (b) of this paragraph.

(b) Most NSF awards support individual scientific research projects and are not “major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment” except in the sense that the long term effect of the accumulation of human knowledge is likely to affect the quality of the human environment. However, such

long term effects are basically speculative and unknowable in advance; thus they normally do not provide a sufficient basis for classifying research as subject to NEPA (See 40 CFR 1508.8) and are categorically excluded from an environmental assessment. Nevertheless, in some cases the actual procedures used in carrying out the research may have potential environmental effects, particularly where the project requires construction of facilities or major disturbance of the local environment brought about by blasting, drilling, excavating, or other means. Accordingly, except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, the following types of activities require at least an environmental assessment:

(1) Cases where developmental efforts are supported, if the project supports the transition of a particular technology from the development stage to large-scale commercial utilization.

(2) Any project supporting construction, other than interior remodeling.

(3) Cases where field work affecting the natural environment will be conducted.

(4) Any project that will involve drilling of the earth, excavation, explosives, weather modification, or other techniques that may alter a local environment.

(5) Any project that provides for the testing and release of biological-control agents for purposes of ecosystem manipulation and assessment of short- and long-term effects of major ecosystem perturbation.

(c) Directorates having divisions or programs with a substantial number of projects that fall within categories (3), (4), and (5) in (b) of this section, are authorized to issue supplemental guidelines to Division Directors and Program Officers establishing subcategories of research methodologies or techniques for which environmental assessments need not be prepared. For example, if a program regularly supports research that involves noninvasive techniques or nonharmful invasive techniques (such as taking water or soil samples, or collecting non-protected species of flora and fauna) the directorate may determine that field projects otherwise coming under paragraph (b)(3) of this section

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which involve only the use of such techniques do not require an environmental assessment. However, any such guidelines must be submitted to the Chairman for approval.

(d) In some cases within the categories listed in paragraph (b) of this section, it will be evident at the outset or after the assessment process is begun that an EIS should be prepared. In such cases an assessment need not be completed, but the process of preparing an EIS (See § 640.5, of this part) should be started.

§ 640.4 Responsibilities and procedures for preparation of an environmental assessment.

(a) Program Officers, as the first point of decision in the review process, shall determine into which category incoming proposals fall, according to the criteria set forth in § 640.3 of this part. Notwithstanding this responsibility of the Program Officer, the appropriate Division Director, Assistant Director, and other reviewing policy officials must assure that adequate analysis is being made.

(b) Where appropriate, programs, divisions, or directorates will advise prospective applicants in program announcements, requests for proposals, and other NSF-prepared brochures of the requirement to furnish information regarding any environmental impact that the applicant's proposed study may have.

(c) Should an environmental assessment be required, the directorate supporting the activity shall be responsible for its preparation. The grant or contract applicant may be asked to submit additional information in order that a reasonable and accurate assessment may be made. Though no specific format for an environmental assessment is prescribed, it shall be a separate document suitable for public review and shall serve the purpose described in 40 CFR 1508.9, which is quoted in full as follows:

Section 1508.9 Environmental Assessment

“Environmental Assessment”:

(a) Means a concise public document for which a Federal agency is responsible that serves to:

(1) Briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare

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an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.

(2) Aid an agency's compliance with the Act when no environmental impact statement is necessary.

(3) Facilitate preparation of a statement when one is necessary.

(b) Shall include brief discussions of the need for the proposal, of alternatives as required by section 102(2)(E), of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted.

(d) A copy of the assessment or drafts shall accompany the appropriate proposal throughout the NSF internal review and approval process. At the option of the directorate preparing the assessment, a draft may be submitted to the Committee for its review and comments. Prior to an award decision, one copy of all completed assessments shall be sent to the Chairman for review and updating of the Committee listing of assessments.

(e) If, on the basis of an environmental assessment, it is determined that an EIS is not required, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) as described in 40 CFR 1508.13 will be prepared. The FNSI shall include the environmental assessment or a summary of it and be available to the public from the Committee. If the proposed action is one that normally requires an EIS, is closely similar to an action normally requiring an EIS, or is without precedent, the FNSI shall be made available for a 30 day public review period before any action is taken.

§ 640.5 Responsibilities and procedures for preparation of an environmental impact statement.

(a) If initially or after an environmental assessment has been completed, it is determined that an environmental impact statement should be prepared, it and other related documentation will be prepared by the directorate responsible for the action in accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the Act, this part, and the CEQ regulations. The responsible directorate will be in close communication with the grant or contract applicant and may have to rely extensively on his or her input in preparing the EIS. However, once a document is prepared it shall be submitted to the Chairman who, after such review